



An employee publication of the  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

May/June 2016  
Volume 23 Issue 5

## Agency News

# Texas Department of Criminal Justice Executive Director Brad Livingston retires in August

**Editor's note:** TDCJ Executive Director Brad Livingston will retire in August after 19 years with the agency and nearly 12 years as Executive Director. He is one of the longest serving executive directors in the agency's history. Livingston has received the Texas Public Employees Association's Agency Administrator of the Year Award four times, and is also the recipient of both the American Corrections Association's E.R. Cass Award, which recognizes dedication and outstanding contribution during the course of a career, and the Association of State Correctional Administrators' Michael Francke Award for Excellence, given to the individual recognized as their Outstanding Director of Corrections. Prior to retiring, he spoke about his career and what the future might hold for him and the TDCJ.



Brad Livingston

### ***Did you think you would serve as TDCJ's executive director for 12 years?***

I didn't have a specific time horizon in mind, and realized early on that the demands and responsibilities of this position require you to consider both today's challenges as well as long-term agency priorities simultaneously. It is not possible to lead this organization effectively if you are focused on your tenure. With the benefit of hindsight, I recognize now how uncommon it is to serve in this role for nearly 12 years. I attribute that longevity

to the strong leadership team we have assembled. It has been a tremendous honor to lead this team and agency as a whole.

### ***Many things have probably changed in criminal justice during your tenure with the agency, what would you say has changed the most?***

Going back to when I started in state government, I would say the state of the Texas criminal justice system has changed dramatically. In the late eighties and early nine-

ties there was a crisis atmosphere with rapid offender population growth, prison and jail overcrowding, a "revolving door" release policy and crime rates much higher than today. In our system today, the offender population has stabilized and declined, we are not overcrowded, the parole board makes release decisions that are no longer driven by population pressures, and crime rates have fallen substantially. The system is stable and in equilibrium. These trends did not reverse overnight and reflect the impact of the policy and operational shift to diversionary, rehabilitation, treatment and reentry programs.

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Texas is fortunate to have a group of committed policymakers and agency professionals pulling together to initiate change and improve our criminal justice system.

## ***What's changed the most at TDCJ?***

TDCJ truly functions as a single agency now, with the probation, prison, and parole functions, treatment and reentry, as well as those providing critical support services working together effectively as a team with a common goal. When I started with the agency in 1997, the merger of prison, parole and probation was relatively new, and I think coordination, communication and cooperation among all the different functions was still a work in progress. I am extremely proud of the way our managers and leaders have embraced change and now view our criminal justice responsibilities from a big picture systemic perspective.

## ***During your tenure as executive director, what accomplishments are you most proud of?***

The state and the agency have accomplished so much, but focusing on the big picture, I think reductions in the size of the offender population and recidivism have to be among the state's biggest achievements, and it's been great to be a part of that. Successfully implementing the expansion of treatment, diversion and reentry programs funded by

the legislature is something we can all be proud of, as is achieving agency-wide accreditation from the American Correctional Association.

The ongoing expansion of correctional officer training and leadership development programs within the agency is something of great personal interest to me, but working with state policymakers while they substantially increased correctional officer and parole officer salaries and took action to maintain a sound pension program for all state employees has been a particular highlight. I can't thank state legislators and Governors Abbott and Perry enough for their support.

Reducing the size of the administrative segregation population, meeting PREA requirements, implementing a risk assessment tool system-wide, receiving positive evaluations during the Sunset review process and adding video surveillance systems and contraband detection equipment to many units are other agency accomplishments also noteworthy.

## ***I am sure there were disappointments along the way, what were some of those?***

When a TDCJ employee is killed in the line of duty, it is more than a disappointment; it is a tragedy, one that obviously affects their family, friends and co-workers most. It also impacts the entire agency in a profound way. Everyone in TDCJ from our frontline staff to the executive director is impacted by the

tragedy. I thank God such incidents are relatively few and far between, but that doesn't make their loss any less painful. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Everything else pales in comparison to the death of an employee, but from an operational prospective, I think correctional officer staffing has been the biggest ongoing challenge during my tenure. Recently we have made a lot of progress filling vacant positions, but it has been a persistent and cyclical issue over the years. Our dedicated and hard-working staff does an outstanding job; they work overtime when necessary to ensure safety and security, but continued improvements in staffing would make their demanding job a little less difficult.

## ***What other challenges do you see in the future for the agency?***

The ongoing challenges of safely and securely operating prisons, supervising offenders in the community, and treatment and reentry cannot be overstated. What our staff does routinely is not routine at all, at least not for most state employees. Each day is a challenge, and each day thousands of staff contribute to the agency's success. The challenge will be to build on that success.

Every state agency is affected by economic conditions, and that won't change in the future. Sometimes policymakers are confronted with more difficult budget situations than others, and agencies may be asked to

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do more with less. However, legislators have been committed to maintaining the critical functions of this agency, and I anticipate that to continue.

Ultimately the challenges will be met, as they have in the past, by the TDCJ's dedicated workforce.

### ***What are your plans for the future?***

I don't have any specific plans as of now. I intend to be actively involved in something worthwhile. I'm not ready to quit working.

### ***Anything else you would like to add?***

I want to say again what an honor it has been to lead this agency. The men and women who work for TDCJ are unsung heroes and dedicated public servants, every one of whom makes a vital contribution to public safety. Whether you work in one of our units, supervise offenders in the community or perform one of the many functions that support those who do, you are performing a public service which makes Texas a safer place to live. I am proud to have been associated with you, and you should be proud of the contributions you make to public safety.

I also want to assure our employees there is an outstanding leadership team in place who will continue to guide the agency in the future. They will build upon and improve upon past successes to make the agency even more effective.

And I just want to say "thank you" one more time. Thank you to each and every TDCJ employee. Thanks for your public service. I deeply appreciate it. ●